

HOW DEAL WITH ARAB NATIONALISM?

Enforcement of Partition Will Strengthen Progressive Forces

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IN THE desperate search for a solution of the Palestine problem, one of the most vital elements of that problem remains an unknown factor—Arab nationalism. Public opinion in the West tends to swing between two extremes: either Arab nationalism is pictured as a weak, artificially stimulated bogey concealing Arab fragmentation and disunity, or it is a monolithic Moslem front, united in implacable hostility to every Jewish aspiration.

But what are the facts and how do these affect the establishment of a workable Palestine policy?

HISTORICALLY, Arab nationalism springs from two main sources, both of which developed simultaneously but independently under the Ottoman Empire during the 19th century. One source, among the tribes of the Arabian Peninsula, was the Islamic puritanism preached by Mohammed ibn Abdul Wahab and sponsored by the Nejdi ruling family of Ibn Saud during the second half of the 18th century. This Islamic revival, in a region which had largely reverted to

paganism, was the motive power behind the slow movement towards the political unification of the tribes of the Arabian Peninsula that has been accomplished, during recent years and after many vicissitudes, by the house of Ibn Saud. The other source of contemporary Arab nationalism was in the more populous and advanced sectors of Arab life; this was the liberal European nationalism that was one of the by-products of the French Revolution, and which was introduced into Syria, together with other European ideas, during the opportunity afforded for outside contacts by Ibrahim Pasha's brief period of rule during the 1830's.

Nothing could have been more dissimilar than these two movements. One was orthodox and conservative; the other was secular and liberal. The one looked for inspiration to the Islamic faith, the other to the Paris boulevards. Both were consciously Arab, but the one regarded Arabism as a matter of tradition and blood, the other as a matter of language and common interest. It is not surprising that the two movements did not coalesce until the downfall of the Ottoman Empire after the First World War made them both part of a single international problem.

The First World War saw the collapse of two ancient empires, the Hapsburg and the Ottoman, and the consequent liberation of the diverse races that had been under their rule. The principal task confronting Allied statesmen at the end of the war was to allocate justly and peacefully the fragments left behind by these two dynasties.

The Asiatic settlement was dominated by the traditional Anglo-French rivalry in the Levant, by the discovery of oil deposits in Iraq, and by the importance of the Suez Canal to British imperial communications.

AT THE very hub of the intricate Palestine question is the rising Arab nationalism of the Near and Middle East. It is one of the newest of our current nationalisms and one of the most complex. It is also the nationalism which both Jew and non-Jew probably understand least—despite the fact that such an understanding would seem to be a prerequisite for intelligent action with regard to Palestine. JOHN MARLOWE is the pen name of a British writer who has had the opportunity to study the subject at first hand over a period of many years, and who here attempts to answer some of the host of inevitable questions about Arab nationalism that perplex the observer. He is the author of *Rebellion in Palestine* (London, 1946).

The Arabian Peninsula, which was of only secondary strategic and economic importance, received its freedom, while the much more culturally advanced Fertile Crescent, consisting of Syria and Mesopotamia, was parceled out between Great Britain and France. Thus the political settlement imposed by the British and French attempted to keep separate the two converging streams of Arab nationalism—which had, indeed, come together for a fleeting moment in the short-lived Syrian kingdom set up by Faisal after the capture of Damascus by the Arab armies guided by T. E. Lawrence.

During the twenty-year period between the two wars, therefore, desert and town pursued their political destinies separately. In the Arabian Peninsula, Abdul Aziz Ibn Saud achieved his task of conquest and consolidation with such success that by 1939 he had become the most considerable figure in the Arab world and a force to be reckoned with in international affairs. But he was less interested in Arab nationalism or unity than in Saudi imperialism, the extension of his own power. It was in the fertile lands, in Syria, in Mesopotamia, and in Egypt, that the struggles for national independence gave Arab nationalism the shape which it has assumed today.

MOVEMENTS of national liberation in the lands of the "Fertile Crescent" for the most part closely followed the pattern of 19th-century European movements. Propelled by westernized intellectuals, they were compounded of idealism and violence, self-sacrifice and self-seeking, enlightenment and atavism. As success came, the magnates, the moneyed and the propertied men slowly shifted their weight over to the struggle against imperialist exploitation and imposed upon the new states, as they emerged, the mortmain of their traditional privileges and semi-feudal powers.

Slowly but surely Anglo-French domination was forced to relax its grip. In Egypt the Protectorate was abolished in 1922 and a constitutional monarchy proclaimed. Full independence followed in 1936. In Iraq,

British military government came to an end in 1922 and Iraq became a constitutional monarchy in treaty relations with Great Britain. In 1932 a second treaty was signed which conferred complete independence upon Iraq and put an end to the British mandate. In Syria and the Lebanon progress was slower, and these two states, upon which France had conferred the status of constitutional republics, were still under French mandate in 1939. Transjordan, although still under British mandate in 1939, was self-governing in its internal affairs, subject to the advice of a British Resident. But in Palestine the Balfour Declaration, on which the policy laid down in the British mandate was based, inhibited any Arab development towards national independence or even self-government.

By 1936 the various independence movements had developed sufficiently to enable the nationalists to take a look over their own frontiers at their immediate neighbors. The shattered unity of the "Fertile Crescent" began to piece itself together again. Egypt, mindful of her new independence, began to look eastwards over the Suez Canal. Ibn Saud, secure in the lordship of the Arabian Peninsula, gazed speculatively in the direction of his Hashemite rivals to the north, sitting on their thrones in Bagdad and in Amman. It was inevitable that the concentrated gaze of the Arab world should become focused on Palestine, where the Arab population was beginning its three year revolt against the mandatory power.

The Palestine rebellion became to the Arab nationalists a rallying point for Arab national unity and a symbol of Arab national struggle. It was to bring out both the weakness and the strength of Arab nationalism. On the one hand it marked the beginning of the revival of that transient sense of Arab unity which had expired with the expulsion of Faisal from Damascus in 1920, and the bridging of the political gulf between the Arabian Peninsula and the "Fertile Crescent" which had been imposed by Anglo-French policy. On the other hand it was eventually to underline the economic

backwardness, the political reaction, and the internal dissensions and jealousies of Arab nationalism.

The Second World War completed the process begun by the Palestine rebellion. By 1943, after Alamein had been fought and won, and after the tide of war had receded from the Near East, it was possible to discern a centripetal, unifying force in Arab affairs which, for the time being, transcended the centrifugal forces of dynastic rivalry, personal jealousy, and regional exclusiveness. This centripetal force crystallized in the Arab League, founded on the Alexandria Protocol of October 1944 and formally brought into existence in March 1945.

ARAB nationalism, as it exists today, is a general term representing the lowest common denominator of the various policies pursued by the member-states of the Arab League. In the field of external politics, this common factor is large enough to amount to a coherent policy. In the field of economic and social affairs it is so small as to be almost invisible. The result is that the outside observer, accustomed to seeing something like a united Arab nationalist front at international conferences and the like, is often surprised at the comparative lack of common outlook in the domestic policies pursued by the various Arab states, and at the lack of a specifically Arab nationalist policy on social and economic matters.

In the "democratic" Arab states, the weakness of the executive, combined with the fear of Communism, has imposed the necessity of adopting a "liberal" attitude towards both the creation of social services and the organization of labor unions and syndicates. But the social services remain mostly on paper and the organization of labor is confined to industrial labor employed by large concerns in the principal cities. The agricultural magnates, who are the principal owners of wealth in the countries of the Near East, have so far been able to avoid paying the high taxes necessary for any comprehensive social services. In the cities, however,

labor has become organized and has improved its position to some extent with the assistance of nationalist governments.

It would be a mistake to assume that the desirability of social reform is not appreciated by Arab nationalist leaders and by educated Arabs generally, at all events in the "democratic" states. Newspapers, and particularly opposition newspapers, are full of articles stressing the need for improved health services, better water supplies, free education, and so on. It is usually assumed that the principal obstacle to the attainment of these improvements lies in the incompetence of the government concerned. A few weeks ago the Cairo newspaper *al Ahram*, one of the few reputable daily newspapers in the Arab world, carried an impressive article, entitled "For Whom the Bell Tolls," which pointed out that Egypt's future national existence depends on a drastic improvement in administrative efficiency and social consciousness.

But would-be social reformers in the Near East are apt to will ends without willing the means. The root of the trouble is not administrative incompetence but the tax system. Social reform, which includes better, and therefore more expensive, administration, can only be implemented by a conscious policy that would distribute income through taxation. However, public opinion in the Near East (and in talking about public opinion it must be remembered that something like 75 per cent of the male and 90 per cent of the female population of the Arab countries are illiterate) is no more prepared for this than public opinion in Western Europe and the United States is ready for any limitation of national sovereignty.

In the "theocratic" states of Saudi Arabia and the Yemen (and to some extent Transjordan), where the executive is strong, and where contact with foreign ideas is slight, there has been no movement at all towards social reform (as understood in the West) or the organization of labor. The patriarchal outlook of Ibn Saud, who is the most powerful personality in the Arab League is probably the main reason why the League has

not adopted any positive policy, even on paper, towards social reform. The emphasis has remained where it was originally placed, on Article Two of the Pact of the Arab League, which implicitly recognizes the impracticability, because of their widely differing social backgrounds, of any genuine co-operation among the Arab states, except in matters of foreign policy. It calls for "close cooperation of the member states with due regard to the structure of each of these states and the conditions prevailing therein."

It is interesting to compare Arab nationalism after the Second World War with Arab nationalism after the First World War. Twenty-eight years ago the various Arab nationalisms had in them something of the dynamism of youth. Arab nationalists, in Egypt, in Syria, and in Iraq—like nationalists elsewhere—really believed that the attainment of national independence would release forces that would sweep away their social and economic disabilities. "Self-determination" was the universal panacea. Today national independence has become more a defensive weapon against newer and more potent ideas than an offensive weapon against the old imperialisms, which in any case are as out of date as the nationalisms that oppose them. There is something unreal and "stagey" about it all. The limitations of national independence have been exposed and a new set of popular remedies is on the market. Progressive youth in the Arab countries, which twenty-five years ago would have been thinking and acting in terms of national independence, are now thinking and acting in terms of social revolution, and tend to regard the conventional nationalists in much the same way as the nationalists themselves once regarded the imperialists.

The prospect of social revolution is at least as alarming to the nationalists, who have long since grown out of the *sans-culotte* stage, as ever the prospect of nationalism was to the imperialists. The effects of this alarm seem finally to have disposed of any prospect that Arab nationalism, as now constituted,

might serve as a vehicle for the social and economic reform of the Near East. Arab nationalism has become far too much identified with the social system as it is for the nationalist leaders to contemplate any drastic change. (This conservatism is due in part to the fact that Arab independence was achieved gradually, and not by sudden violence, so that the careerists had time to enrich themselves and the propertied men to accommodate themselves.) Consequently, Arab nationalism has been more concerned with diverting popular attention from social change than with any attempt to fit Arab policy as a whole to the realities of the international situation.

Moslem fanaticism has been excited in opposition to demands for social change, xenophobia has been encouraged to divert attention from oppression at home, imperialism has been denounced as being responsible for what are in effect the results of a semi-feudal social order. The struggle for Arab independence in Palestine, which does excite genuine popular feeling in many parts of the Arab world, has been put forward as the principal object of Arab policy and the principal *raison d'être* of Arab unity.

THE existence of the unsolved Palestine problem perpetuates reaction throughout the Arab world. It diverts progressive thought and action into the stagnant channels of chauvinistic nationalism. It exacerbates the mindless Moslem fanaticism which is the sworn enemy of all social and economic progress. It insures the dominance of people of the type of Haj Amin el Husseini, ex-Mufti of Jerusalem, whose influence depends on the extent to which he can exploit the emotions of fear, greed, and hate. In short, the Palestine issue enables Arab nationalism to justify itself to the Arabs without offering constructive achievements.

The Palestine struggle also serves to paper over the cracks in the facade of Arab unity. It is a mistake to imagine that there is any more genuine unity among the governments of the Arab states than there is, for example, among the governments of South America.

Implicit in all Arab politics is the dynastic rivalry between the Saudites and the Hashemites before World War I.

Husain al Hashemi, Sherif of Mecca and, subsequently, King of the Hejaz, was, by virtue of his overlordship of the holy places of Islam, the foremost prince in Arabia and Ibn Saud's principal rival for the mastery of the Peninsula. He allied himself with the British in the 1914-18 war, and his warriors played their part in the defeat of the Turks. After many vicissitudes his sons, Faisal and Abdullah, were elevated by the British to the thrones of Iraq and Transjordan. The house of Ibn Saud appeared to be hemmed in by the house of Hashem on all its landward frontiers, but Abdul Aziz Ibn Saud, having disposed of his other near rival, Ibn Rashid of the Jebel Shammar, turned his attention to Husain, and by 1925 had made himself master of the Hijaz and the holy cities.

Since then there has been bitter enmity between the ruler of Saudi Arabia on the one hand and the rulers of Iraq and Transjordan on the other. There have been plots and counterplots, intrigues and counter-intrigues. Each party has its adherents in the neighboring Arab states, and the partition of the Arab world, established by Anglo-French imperialism, is perpetuated by dynastic rivalry.

There are many other sources of dissension in the Arab world. In Palestine the supporters of Abdullah, who want to see Palestine united with Transjordan, are at odds with the supporters of the ex-Mufti who want an independent Palestine under his own personal rule. The Christian Arab majority of the Lebanon pays lip-service to, but in reality fears and dislikes, the prospect of Moslem domination which is implicit in Arab unity. Communal strife in Iraq between the orthodox Sunnis and the heretic Shias is never far below the surface. Egypt has of recent years been more interested in the future of the Sudan than in the future of Palestine, and more concerned with North Africa than with Western Asia. Ibn Saud has made it quite clear that Saudi

Arabia does not intend to embroil herself with the United States and Great Britain for the sake of Palestine.

After the lead which Ibn Saud has given, it is abundantly clear that no Arab state is prepared to forfeit a major source of revenue by making the continuance of oil concessions to Anglo-American interests dependent on political concessions to the Arabs over Palestine. On the other hand sufficient men, money, and arms will certainly be provided by the Arab states to enable guerrilla warfare to be maintained almost indefinitely in Palestine unless UN is prepared to implement partition with a sufficient degree of force and determination.

B RITISH policy towards Arab nationalism has been more or less consistent for the last twenty-eight years. After rebellion in Iraq and riots in Egypt had convinced Britain of the strength of nationalism in the Near East, successive British governments have pursued a policy of building up a bloc of independent Arab states, in treaty relations with Great Britain, that would (a) provide Great Britain with the facilities required, both in peace and in war, for the maintenance of her imperial communications; (b) secure for Great Britain and her allies unhindered access to the oil resources of the Near and the Middle East; and (c) constitute a barrier against Communist expansion, either military or ideological, into Africa and Southeast Asia. A certain lack of intellectual resilience on the part of the British representatives in the Arab world has prevented self-criticism, and the pursuance of her policy has led Great Britain, imperceptibly but inexorably, into becoming identified with those reactionary ruling cliques into which Arab nationalism has congealed.

In recent years British mandatory commitments in Palestine have proved a serious embarrassment to Great Britain in her relations with Arab nationalism. The same strategic reasons which led her to sponsor the Jewish national home after the First World War seemed insistently to demand the abandonment of that sponsorship after the Sec-

ond World War. It is an indication both of the precariousness of Great Britain's relations with Arab nationalism, and of the importance Arab nationalism attaches to Palestine that the British government felt itself unable to "sell" partition to the Arab states. For there is little doubt that, with wholehearted British support, partition could have been implemented in such a way as to have discouraged serious Arab resistance on the one hand and to have compelled a Zionist spirit of cooperation towards the Arabs on the other hand.

The effect of the British attitude to partition has been both to encourage Arab resistance and to increase Zionist intransigence. The apparent strength of Arab resistance, combined with the fact that American State Department policy in the Arab world is largely dependent on British advice and British experience, has in turn dissuaded the American government from putting its full weight behind implementation. Consequently it appears at the moment as if Arabs and Jews will be left to fight it out between themselves.

Any suggestion that the Zionists will be "pushed into the sea" may be discounted, together with any suggestion that the Zionists of themselves would be able to enforce the partition. What is certain is that the present Anglo-American attitude will confirm both Arab nationalism and Zionism in all their most reactionary, violent, and destructive tendencies.

COMMUNIST Russia is likely to be the only beneficiary of the present situation. In the Arab world there are developing all those conditions which have already made Eastern Europe such an easy prey to Soviet expansion. The vitality that enabled Arab nationalism to cast off the fetters of imperialism has been inherited by a new generation which, although not specifically Communist, tends to look to Moscow rather than to Cairo or Damascus. The social democracy of the West, which in other circumstances might have appealed to this new generation, is obscured for them by the

identification of the West with the most reactionary elements in their own countries.

In Saudi Arabia the present patriarchal despotism may be able to inhibit "dangerous thoughts" and insure social stability for several more generations, provided there are no serious dynastic disturbances after the death of the present ruler. In the pseudo-democracies of the Fertile Crescent, with their racial minorities, their feudal magnates, and their inefficient administrations, the situation is far different. Neither Great Britain nor the United States can afford to let the governments of these states continue to use the Palestine issue as a refuge from constructive thought, a substitute for economic cooperation, and a vehicle for emotional excess.

The Palestine question has become a form of emotional and political self-indulgence for both Arabs and Zionists. The present situation is making nonsense of Anglo-American policy in the Near East, which can be defined, briefly, as the denial of the Near East to Communism both militarily and ideologically. It is high time that the British and the American governments began to weigh their Palestine policies on their merits instead of in terms of American party politics or of the personal prejudices of the British Foreign Secretary.

UNLESS the present Anglo-American attitude is altered, civil war in Palestine will become endemic, as it has become in Greece; the Arabs will continue to be debauched by a wild fanaticism designed to stimulate a sense of unity but which, by inhibiting social and economic development, will ultimately bring disintegration. The rivalries and dissensions of the Arab world will never be healed by a common hate or even by a common peril. The only way in which the states and peoples of the "Fertile Crescent" (for Egypt and Saudi Arabia are already showing signs of leaving the rest of the Arab states to their own devices) can be brought to a sense of reality is by a decisive implementation of partition followed by Anglo-American insistence on conciliatory

behavior by the new Zionist state, the peaceful existence of which would depend on Anglo-American diplomatic support. If opposition to partition were shown to be sufficiently hopeless, Arab opinion would eventually accept the inevitable and, after the first shock had passed, begin to contemplate a state of affairs in which racial hatred and emotional excess had ceased to be political necessities.

It is not yet too late for second thoughts. If the Arab states are strong enough to liquidate the Zionists, Great Britain and the United States will sooner or later have to intervene to prevent this. If they are not strong enough to liquidate the Zionists, then they are not strong enough to withstand Anglo-American determination to enforce partition. British and American indecision is based on a complete misreading of Arab nationalism. The Arab reaction to partition was a sign, not of strength but of weakness, a sign not of awakening, but of an endeavor to keep from falling asleep. It is significant

that the relative vehemence of the reactions of the various Arab states to partition has been in inverse proportion to the material resources, social stability, military strength, and administrative efficiency of the states concerned.

There are sufficient examples in modern history to show that the constructive contributions of nationalism end with the attainment of national independence. But the Arab leaders are trying to establish nationalism as the sole content of national policy. It is melancholy to consider the possibility that Arab nationalism may be travelling along the same road as has been travelled by Balkan nationalism—liberation, followed by turbulent and sterile independence, leading finally, through war, to Soviet domination. If the Arab states travel along this road, it is probable that the Zionist state will have to travel along it too. Will Palestine prove to be another Macedonia? The answer is, to a large extent, in the hands of Great Britain and the United States.